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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3873
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003438

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DIYALA PRT: SUNNIS CALL FOR SHIITE POLICE CHIEF
REMOVAL

Classified By: Diyala PRT Team Leader John Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Diyala PRT reporting cable.

SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) On September 17, approximately 400 residents of Baqubah in the Diyala province gathered in front of the Government Center (GC) to peacefully demonstrate for the removal of Shiite Iraq Police (IP) Chief Staff Major Ghanem Abass Ibrahim al-Qureshy Abass Ibrahim al-Qureshy. Demonstrators consisted primarily of Sunni members of the Concerned Local Nationals (CLN), a group that has recently enjoyed some support from Coalition Forces (CF) and retains armed cadres in several Diyala neighborhoods. The CLN has accused Ghanem of arbitrarily arresting and murdering CLN members, holding them in lengthy pre-trial detention, and refusing to accept CLN members as part of the Iraq Security Forces (ISF). During the month of September, the Diyala IP reported over 17 "violations," including murder, kidnapping, assault, and extortion by the CLN. The demonstration is yet another indication of the increasing divide between Shi'a and Sunnis in Diyala. The demonstration also encompassed several features unique to recent political dynamics in Diyala, and raises several important questions about the current role of CLN, CF support for this group, and the possible impact of the group on future political discourse in the provinces. END SUMMARY.

CLN CALLS FOR REMOVAL OF SHIITE POLICE CHIEF

[1](#)3. (C) On September 17, nearly 400 Baqubah residents held a peaceful demonstration to call for the removal of Shiite Iraq Police Chief Staff Major General Ghanem Abass Ibrahim al-Qureshy Abass Ibrahim al-Qureshy. The protesters, primarily comprised of Sunni members of the CLN, accused Ghanem of conspiring against the CLN. Previous to the demonstration, on September 16, four CLN representatives met with Sunni Deputy Governor Auwf Rahoumi Majeed al-Rabi'a to request permission to hold a march through Baqubah to call for Ghanem's removal. Auwf quickly approved the request.

[1](#)4. (C) The CLN has accused Ghanem of promoting sectarianism, including murdering and arbitrarily arresting CLN members, holding them for lengthy pre-trial detention, and committing large-scale fraud. CLN also accuses Ghanem of creating death squads, refusing to hire CLN members into the IP, and meeting with Iranian embassy officials in secret. CLN Kataab leader Jaji Omar told PRT officials that on September 15 eight IP officers from the Emergency Response Force (ERF) shot and killed a member of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade and a retired Iraqi Army General. Both were allegedly CLN members. Omar told us that several ex-police officers, who the IP claims were fired for dereliction of duty and related offenses by Ghanem, are reportedly CLN members.

15. (C) Ghanem has refused to accept the CLN as a legitimate partner in the law enforcement community; he refers to them as the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade, and has accused them of being a sectarian militia that unlawfully terrorizes citizens and acts with impunity. In a September 22 memorandum, Ghanem listed 17 "violations" committed by what he referred to as this "armed group in the city of Baqubah from September 1 to September 20." The list includes the kidnapping of eight policemen, kidnapping at least seven civilians, opening fire on an IP patrol that refused to surrender its weapons (killing one policeman), and a small arms attack on a police headquarters in Tahrer. Ghanem also alleges CLN members have created a province-wide extortion ring. In meetings with CLN representatives arranged by CF and the Governor's office, Ghanem has repeatedly stated that he sees the arrest and detention of CLN members as a primary law enforcement objective. During a September 24 interview with Associated Press reporter Lauren Frayer, Ghanem stated that the CLN assisted CF to identify AQI, but that now an element within CLN has reverted back to terrorist activities, including terror finance. Ghanem insists that CLN must either join ISF or disarm. While praising those from CLN who have already joined the IP, he lamented the fact that he does not currently have the capacity to hire new IPs at this time. He did offer solutions, including the federal government providing regular jobs for CLN members, or offerereng CLN members limited six months security contracts. Ghanem also inquired how the CF planned to engage the CLN.

WHERE DID THE CLN COME FROM AND WHERE IS IT GOING?

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16. (C) There is confusion about the origin of the CLN. Some claim the CLN is an offshoot of the "Baqubah Guardians," that aided CF to locate weapons caches and identify AQI members during Operation Arrow Head Ripper in Diyala. Others, like Ghanem, view them as members of the old 1920s Brigade. The organization appears to have supporters in Baqubah, Kataab, Tahrer, Khalis, and other areas where AQI formerly held influence. Others insist the CLN was formerly aligned with AQI in Diyala, but fell out of with them over administrative, disciplinary and ideological differences.

17. (C) Currently, CLN is secular and is comprised mainly of unemployed youth. Although viewed in a positive light for its previous actions to oust AQI, more recent behavior has drawn criticism from Baqubah residents. Haji Uday, Haji Omar of Kataab, Dr. Hussein al-Zubaidi, and Thaha Aziz have been identified as the circle of leaders within the organization. At a September 18 meeting between the DCG, MNC-I, senior ISF leaders and CLN leadership in the Diyala Operations Center (DOC), Haji Uday declared himself the overall leader of CLN. Also during this meeting, Haji Uday said the provincial government (primarily the IP) is biased against the CLN, and CLN members would be inclined to not join the IP. In the interim, CLN repeatedly stated that ISF is the sole legitimate security force in Diyala and called for the CLN to either join the ISF or disarm. Some community members speculate that CLN lacks a charismatic leader, and that one of two senior Sunni members of the Diyala government seemed poised to assume power. (Deputy Governor Auwf Rahoumi Majeed al-Rabi,a and Assistant Governor Hafeth Abdul-Azeez Jum,a Saleh al- Jubouri)

COMMENT

18. (C) Given Diyala's notoriety for lawlessness and insecurity in the past, it is notable that the CLN was able to hold a relatively peaceful demonstration, and even more surprising that the protesters requested and received

permission from the Government and protection from the IP. However, serious concerns remain about increasing Sunni-Shi'a tensions fueled by allegations of IP bias against CLN members and the uncertainty of CLN intentions. A serious re-examination of the current utility of CLN is necessary for CF to determine its position on the CLN's existence as an armed group with para-legal/extralegal authority. The political ambitions of individual Sunni leaders within the Diyala government, and their possible connection to the CLN are also areas to be addressed. A failure to determine a timely USG/CF and GOI response to the CLN situation could result in the establishment of another largely Sunni militia and could lead to reprisals by Shi'a groups, causing even great sectarian strife. END COMMENT.

BIO NOTE

19. (C) Ghanem became IP Chief following the removal of SMG Ghassan al-Bawi in December 2006 for inefficiency and compelling evidence of sectarianism. Ghanem came out of retirement to take the post, and his qualifications, while entirely military, seemed to represent an excellent choice for a police force pre-occupied primarily with security-related issues. A retired General in the Iraqi Army, he was hailed as a national hero and reportedly decorated for bravery on sixteen occasions by Saddam personally. Like many senior officers during Saddam's tenure, Ghanem is secular; in contrast to most however, he is a Shi'a and does not fast during Ramadan. His Iraqi nationalist credentials are strong and his reported hatred of Iran, Iranians, and their agents (possibly a reference to Shi'a clergy) is well-known. He is known as a disciplinarian with a will to win and has been known to summarily dismiss policemen who flee in the face of danger. He is also alleged to have executed Iraqi soldier deserters during the Iran-Iraq war.

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